Queens College
Charlotte, N.C.
1988

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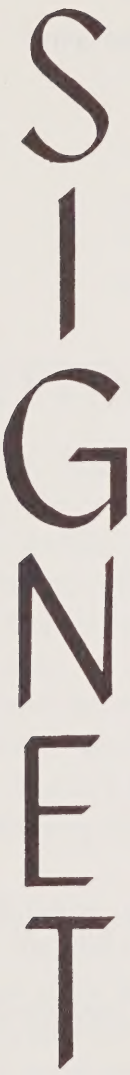


Cover photo by Michael Snell

IMAGES IN AUTUMN

dry maple leaves
orange
gold
red
yellow
brown

bare branches swaying in the whisper of the wind

warm
dark sweaters that come up to your neck
wooly brown
dark green
earthy brown
burnt red
grey

orange
yellow
red
gold fires in cozy livingrooms

dark
starless nights with moonlight

long pants
warm coats
scarfs

cheeks flushed from the change from cold wind to warm fires

hayrides with the straw flying as we speed past dimly lit
houses at sundown

the trickle and patter of rain while you sleep

warm
soft
scented
white sheets and warm
wool afghans

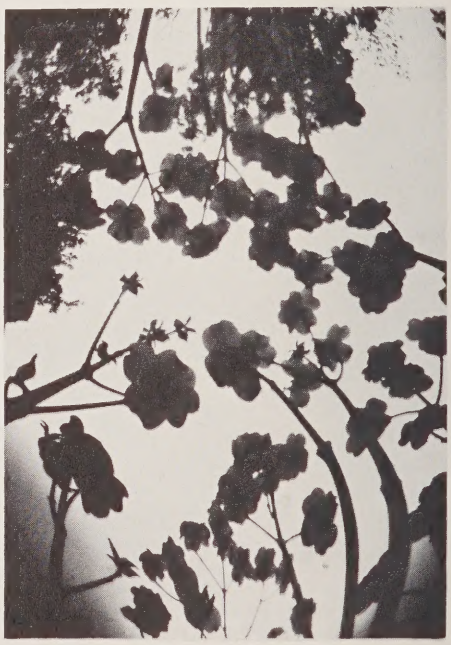
the crunching sound when you walk

the cold wind swirling dry leaves
the air filled with earthy colors

the smell of wood burning from chimneys
and damp leaves and trees in the woods
smelled through cold noses

Autumn in Virginia.

Debbie Majewski



Michael Snell

UNTITLED

While red-white NO blares at Pepsi
and Monarch and Grass walls
through the window that cuts off reality

Pack-man eats in the Philadelphia Deli
and Swoosh-hum cars and planes pass the
barrier
isolating those within from those without.

Red Neon strip in Opthomologist's office.
Unblinking, sleep-cracked eye of cyclopes
Perceives Bud Light belly-up to the bar

Sipping and shedding gray flannel suit
and dock siders, isolated by double pain
glass from hurry rush-rush hours

Impatient horn turns heads inside out
while jags and chevy's and bullet wagons
park at the twin red beacons-busy blood cells
blocked by a change in the flow

Otherside, Curly headed black in blue
never changing the sweep of his cleaner
takes care of the cyclopes

while people within just "die laughing;"
at the end of a conversation-rope,
"I was a drool dripping spider"

Strange difference
joy spices life
like a jalapeno pepper
burning cold on tongue

Paula Brown

SETTING

The night was cool and clear, unusually so for August in Charlotte. But I could still feel the dampness hanging heavy in the air. As I sat on my bike, anxiously ready for the final moment, I abserved the scene around me. I was somewhere in the middle of 4,000 bikers, all just as anxious as I for the policeman in front of us to give the sign that meant "go". Everywhere, there were smatterings of red, black, and yellow — spots of color on the cyclists bodies. The city's lights made flashes of light bounce from the thousands of bikes that surrounded me.

We were on the edge of the city. Thousands of shimmering bicycles all reflecting the lights of the city, lined the streets. It was so bright outside that I almost forgot it was close to midnight. There were no stars above me, just a haze of yellow light. But as I turned around and looked behind me, towards the residential areas, the night turned into an inviting blackness. The sky over there seemed to open up to reveal millions of silvery stars.

The windows of the Charlotte Observer Building mirrored the colorful cyclists. Again, flashes of red, blue, black, and yellow, dotted the dark windows. I looked at the men beside me. I could smell the saltiness of the sweat that was pouring down their faces and necks. I yawned and drew in a breath. The air was wet and heavy and tasted like the rainwater we used to drink in the well in our backyard when I was younger. I saw the tenseness that I could feel surrounding me. Pumped muscles worked as anxious cyclers stretched and pulled them into place.

I looked at my watch. It was 11:50 p.m. Two more minutes to go and we'd be on our way. I gripped the chrome handlebars hard. They were cold and slippery. My legs felt unusually stiff and weak. I should have warmed up like everyone else around me had done. It was too late. The policeman in front of the huge mass of metal and flesh turned towards us. As he began to raise his long arm into the air, a few of the more serious riders instinctively moved into the ready position: head down, shoulders humped over, and lower body ready to surge ahead. It was time. The policeman flagged his hand and jumped out of our way as 4,000 pairs of pedals turned, all at once, working to get out in-front of the crowd. This is what we had waited for!

Kathy Figiel

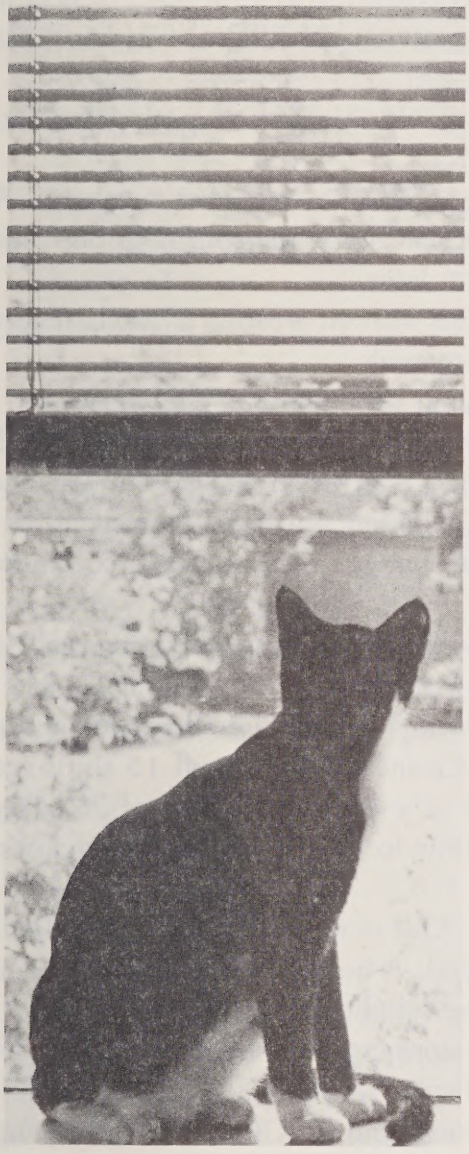
NIGHTSOUNDS

It's 12:35 a.m.
It should be quiet.
But it's not.
Outside my window
(Which, open at two inches,
Is open much too wide)
I study the chirping, screaming,
Humming, clicking, singing of
Countless grasshoppers, crickets,
Jar-flies, June-bugs, beetles,
As they endeavor to keep me awake.
(I think it's working.)
I roll over restlessly in bed,
Groping and pawning to pull the blanket
Up to just the right spot over my neck,
Enjoying its murmur as it rubs
Against the bottom sheet.
I feel the subdued whisper of my hair
Moving across the pillow,
And laugh silently at the fibers in my matress
Protesting to my ears as my head
Seeks a cool spot.
Suddenly I sense the distant clacking
Of wheels upon rails.
I glance at my clock: 12:44.
(Right on time.)

The train comes closer — I am part of
The grinding, clicking, clacking . . .
  it fades
    it comes closer
  it fades
    it comes closer
  it fades
    it comes closer
In the mesmerizing repetition of trainsound
Only a locomotive can emit.
As it fades the final time,
I glance again at my clock
(12:52,)
Noting the silent sound
Of the red second-light blinking on and off.
I turn away and re-roll over,
Wondering at the crazy, creative noises
These thoughts are making
As they dance around my head,
Chiding me to get up and record them.
Then I hear them laugh and shout triumphantly
  as I reach for the lightswitch.

Sara Jenkins

THE BLACK CATS



Nicole Wilson

Dawn
breaks the sleep
of the night, and whispering pink and pale yellow
finally shouts gold at the sky.

Gold spreads until
the sky jumps out in vivid blue,
splatted with clouds,
rolling in milky puffs,
thinning out, then disappearing.

The red wings
of the airplane
cut through the vivid blue
splatted with clouds,
running and dipping,
then swooping close to the crowd,
blowing mustard-straw hats
off of heads
cropped short, or curled and set.
buzZZZZZ!
"OOOoooohhhh! AAAaaaahhhh!"
The beige suits and pastel dresses
eat the buttery-golden popcorn and sticky-pink cotton candy,
While the vivid blue,
with splatted milky clouds,
dims
and the gold
begins to shout,
finally whispering pale yellow and pink,
as the day is pushed around the globe.

The black cats pack up
and go home.

Katherine Hill

TIME AS A COMMODITY

I have an uncanny sense of time. I wake up in the middle of the night and before my eyes search for the digital numbers across the room, I can guess the exact time within ten to fifteen minutes. My guess last night was 4:44 a.m. When my eyes adjusted to read the digits, it was 4:49.

I don't know where this outstanding skill might lead me unless someone designs a new television game show — wake the contestants up at varying times, cameras in bedrooms, of course.

Or, stop a person in the mall, one not wearing a Rolex, and ask what time it is. The grand prize could be one of those shopping sprees where you select as much merchandise as your heart desires in "x" number of minutes. The name of the show or shopping mall contest could be "Do YOU know the time?"

Celebrities would compete with ordinary contestants. Who wouldn't want to peak into Burt Reynolds' bedroom or see Madonna without make-up at 3 a.m.?

Time is a commodity. We spend it. We count it. We try to save some of it. We want more of it. A commercial for a painkiller suggests, "we haven't got time for the pain." People rob us of our time when they say, "I haven't got time right now. I'll get back to you later."

Today's superachievers, male or female, wouldn't leave the house without wearing a watch. Every minute of their time must be spent in successful pursuit of concrete goals.

Just imagine if somehow a superachiever might find a free hour in the middle of the week.

She reads an ad for "Body Boutique," in the newspaper. It says, "here is your DREAM COME TRUE!! — The Exercise Alternative." The article lists everything the achiever can do "in just one hour:" walk two miles, do 300 sit-ups, reduce thigs, break down cellulite, firm flabby arms and flatten the tummy. Well, the achiever can't resist this. Where else can one get that much exercise in an hour?

But, this hour can produce even more. There's a one-hour cleaners in the same shopping mall, a one-hour photo service, and an instant passport photo studio.

The achiever can drop off her eyeglass prescription at "Eye Openers" — they'll be ready in "about one hour," the ad promises. Next, she can dash into the 1-Hour Cleaners and drop off 15 shirts she doesn't have time to iron this week. Kodak film can be deposited at a drive-in window of "Quality 1-hr Photo." And, the passport photo is "instant," so she'll have time for that while the Health Food Store prepares her take-out tofutti salad.

Finally, it's time for Body Boutique. A sign on the door reads, "Our new MIT 3500 TANNING system has arrived." The achiever stops dead in her tracks for a second. A quick decision must be made — to tan herself in the remaining 45 minutes, or break down the cellulite in her thighs.

But, achievers don't have time for quick decisions. The brain-storming must be done in the off-hours so the decisions will just automatically pop out as if on a display terminal.

Who said times goes by fast when we're having fun? You don't know? Oh, well, look it up sometime when you have the time.

In the meantime, I'm going to the shopping mall. I heard they're having a one-hour sale on Rolex watches, or was it Swatch? Citizen, Seiko?

And, guess what? Vanna White and Pat Sajaks are promoting a new game show at the mall. It's called "As the Clock Ticks."

I'll buy my watch after I win the contest.

Lois Henry

DADDY IN THE DRESS SHOP

Prom dresses hang rack after rack
Swathing the walls
In cotton candy billows
And Easter egg colors.

Skirts crackle with crisp crinolin;
Puffed sleeves float in pale, wispy clouds.
They are like dancers in a forest
Offering magical secrets.

I wonder if they know what I did this morning,
If the smell of the farm still clings to my skin.
Can one of them
Cover my innocence, whitewash my fear?

I slip into apple blossoms
That show too-brown skin, too-red hair.
Spring's first green sifts over my frame,
And I look like a child in Mama's castoffs.

He brings me white lace.
Sleeves touching fingertips trace images down my arm.
The pristine neckline garlands my throat.
Filmy layers float from my waist.

It is one
With my body,
Wrapping me in fancy,
Covering my rawness.

I see Daddy in the dress shop
Turn his head from my view,
Reach his hand to his eye,
Walk outside.

Andrea F. Varela

"PLAYGROUND-TALK"

Tip, Tap
One two three
"My mothers' prettier than yourn"
said the little pink girl
as she sat
skirt blossomed out
looking for the proper spot
to take the next bite.

Tip, Tap
One two three
"Now you lost your turn"
said the little pink girl
"Can't you count?"
cone on the ground
crying for the pools around her feet
sticky hands turned up.

Tip, Tap
One two three
"Why can't I play now?"
said the pretty pink girl
while she stood
hands on her hips
watching the rope turn 'round
pink tongue stuck out.

Rhonda Ball

REFLECTIONS POST-THUNDERSTORM

I sat in the ugly lounge-recliner
Reading about the archetypal feminine:
A chapter on the hetaira and the foolish virgin.
I think I'm the foolish virgin.
Then I heard the checker-clatter begin
On the awning over the back porch.
So I went out, and found the cloud offerings
Cascading in a cadence of physical sensations to greet me.

My family joined me in the garage
To watch the grayness fall wet bit by wet bit;
They waited until the dispensation was over,
And returned to the cushions
Of coupons and Concepcion.
But I stayed, and when it was over,
Watched yellow-white streaks of fury
Laser the ground in a split-second,
And listened to the hunger-sounds of the sky,
Stomach-empty after the rain.

And then I walked to the street
And stood toe-deep in a warm puddle,
Watching goose-bumps pimple my legs
As a cry of mercy to the breeze.
I scudded through the river of water
Racing desperately to life in the cess-sewer
Around the corner. I thought it hard to believe . . .
Here I am, on a street that is not even my own,
Splashing rain-remnant puddles like a child,
Which I suspect I always am;
Reflecting on the robin sitting in my yard
And the bubbles my feet create sitting on my river,
Like the adult I want to become.

So I returned to my garage for paper,
Ostensibly to record my paltry, insignificant brain-ramblings,
But really to watch the dirt-brown pavement
Fade to near-innocent white,
And the tomato-red centipede scurry into a cement grave-tunnel.
And to hear the mother next door scream,
"Close that gate right now!"

Sara Jenkins

CAPTURED

His stone eyes are closed
Not in prayer, more like in death.
No wrinkles crease the youthful forehead
To show thoughts forming in his mind.

A crescent scar on his right temple
Alone mars the smooth surface of skin.
High cheeks flank a hawk nose
Plunging down, dividing his face.

His lips are prominent,
Set, though not hard.
Black beads and bird feathers
At the left ear signify his status.

He must have been a warrior
Or wanted to be
Or had to be.
The tribe would have expected it.

His face is still now,
Features captured in clay.
In the quietness of his expression
Strength is plain.

Any moment I expect
His eyes to open
And dart with the
Instinct of survival.

Andrea F. Varela

BAKEM

Bloody river
painful ordeal
muscles contract
standing can not be done
she soars to the floor and lands safely.
He is ready to make his mark in the world.
the red carpet is laid.
A pleasure for him I wonder, but surely nothing but pain for her,
completely natural, no anesthesia —
"this ain't by choice."
Niagra gushing forth, whoosh whoosh
"I see the head, quite tiny, he is."
She is not doing too much pushing.
"I see the shoulders, the arms,
Buddy is swimming into the world.
I see his feet."
Almost over.
"AH" she sighs in relief.
Now that it is over,
I think "yuk, how gross.
Who is going to clean this mess."
Quite honestly, I can't remember
who, but it probably was me.
The paramedics
are here; She and baby
are taken to the hospital.
I have a new brother — Bakem.

Tanya Watley

GREGG AND CAROL

Like the seasons in its cycle, so are Gregg and Carol.
Every summer, the two lovers meet in the park under an oak.
Gregg is kind of cute with his slick brown hair
and glassy almond colored eyes.
He is wearing this cool turquoise and white t-shirt,
and no bottom, his pointing brown-silver haired tail erect.
Carol is wearing a pink mini-dress with a matching bow.
She and Gregg have matching tails.
Gregg brings the 6x6" picnic blanket.
Carol brings the food:
nutfurters, nut salad, nut burgers, nut drink, and nut chips.
They sit on their hinds, holding their food with two hands,
like a child whose hands are too small.
They nibble,
as they watch people walking by, looking
out of the corner of their eyes
brave enough not to run,
and daring anyone to come too near.
This is the typical summer afternoon for Gregg and Carol.

Tanya Watley

DO NOT PASS GO

Maybe the starting point
Catches us in narcotic smoke
That swirls us into a dream
We never remember exactly right
. . . I don't know.

Maybe those who go through the motions,
Play by the rules:
Two children, house in suburbia,
Are dividing themselves into separate territories
. . . I don't know.

Maybe the old ones holding hands
Baring white flesh to the rushing sea
Are building sandcastles in their minds
Because they will not admit the truth
. . . I don't know.

Maybe you and I are way ahead
And forward is really backward
And this is the last game
But children can't play it
. . . I don't know.

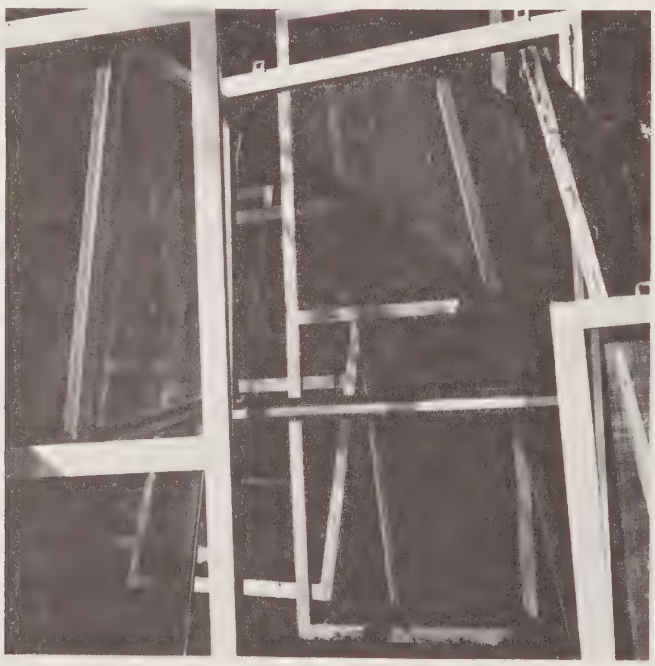
COLLISION

Crashed into you
at lunch today;
head-on collision
of wills,
hearts buried
in the wreckage,
Back on the job,
an hour later,
with no visible signs of injury,
whiplash set in.

Struggling to focus
shattered glass energies,
when what i really want
is a trip to the body & soul shop.
Waiting for the insurance estimator
to survey the damages;
who pays for the needed repairs?

Sara Lee Hinnant

Andrea F. Varela



Michael Snell

UNTITLED

It was the kind of night that makes dogs run for cover under front porches. The wind blew in from the coast and smacked tree branches into cringing paned glass. Screen doors screeched open and slammed shut again. It was too dry to smell anything, really, just the dryness of the scattering leaves. Heat lightning did an ice cool bump and grind in the sky. The birds shivered in the wild tree branches waiting for the pounding thunder that wouldn't come. And three strangers sauntered into Cactus Jack's Brew and Billiards.

The place got so quiet that for once you didn't have to press your skull upside the juke box to hear Patsy Cline belt out "San Antonio Rose." The smoke hung in petrified layers: Jim the barkeep's Cuban smoke sunk to bottom, the smoke from the pool-playin' Marlboro men hung mid-air, and the tight-assed wisps from the Virginia Slim 120's exhaled by five pert co-eds danced en pointe above it all. Boozer, the guard dog rose on his hackles and belched out one low growl. Then Jim nodded and the usual din cranked up again.

Bocephus' rowdy friends were askin', "Why do you drink, Hank? And why do you roll smoke?" And one high plains drifter broke and came up stripes. And three long-haired strangers moseyed to the bar. Two of the strangers ordered Budweiser, and when Jim asked the third, "What'll you have?" he answered, "What do you got?" Jim handed him a cold Bud and went to tie up Boozer.

Two of the long-hairs sat at the bar and nursed their Buds. The other one took a walk on the wild side and got busted for impersonating one of the species. He hit one of the college girls up for a dance. It wasn't that she wasn't flattered, and she thanked him for the offer, but, really, Cactus Jack's wasn't that kind of place. Well, then, maybe he'd buy them a drink — but that was one line they weren't bitin'. Fine, he said, fuck 'em — fuck 'em all. And a low, "Hey, hey," came from the business end of the bar. So, long, tall, and greasy moved on.

In his ramble, he spied a weathered old black man in the corner by the back way rockin' to "Mama He's Crazy."

"Say, hey, Niggah Joe, don't you know you down in Dixie? What you think you doin' in this whiteman's drankin' establishment?"

Niggah Joe, whose name was William, looked Long-tall up and down, sighed, and growled, "Well, son, I guess I'm doing what you should be; and that would be drinking my beer and minding my own business instead of flappin' my ignorant long-haired gums in a joint where they don't be long, eh?" So Long-tall and tactless pushed his point.

"So you belong here, do you? And did they buy you? I thought that went out when that commie Lincoln took over. Is what you're tryin' to tell me that after hundreds of years of emancipation that somebody still owns you?"

"Emancipation's a big word for you boy. It's almost as long as your hair. How'd you manage that trick?"

William was out of his seat by this time and his flexing fists were keeping perfect tempo with "Don't Call Him a Cowboy Until You've Seen Him Ride." Long-tall's sidekicks were out of the saddle too and steering him back for another long-neck. As Jim pried the cap off the cold dark bottle, he almost whispered, "You watch your step in here Rapunzel, or you'll lose those pretty locks. Don't mess with the bull, boy, you'll get the horns."

So the three strangers drank in silence and watched the High Plains drifter rake in the quarters at the pool tables. First, he beat the co-eds, then the barmaid Alice, then the other shitkickers one by one. And as the girls got drunker he played them again, but he bought them each a beer to ease the pain of losing — even to a fine Southern gentleman. And Long-tall watched it all.

About six beers later, the stranger challenged the drifter to a game. The drifter, in his big-grinned, cowboy way accepted. Quarters placed in the groove slid home and the balls clonked into the slot on the side.

"Set 'em up," greased Long-tall.

"You break," was the response from the high plains.

As the chalk danced off the cue ball, even the giggling co-eds knew it was a bad break. Not a ball rolled home. It was the cowboy's shot and, let's just say, it stayed that way. When not a stripe could be seen on the green felt, the drifter called "Left corner." And when the game was over, he gripped the cue with both hands and stretched it behind his back and yawned. "Guess that's it for me, Jim. I'm goin' home."

He turned to leave but he hadn't gotten to the door before there was a loud crack and his body bowed back like a marionette gone haywire. What happened next was a little like in the movies. High Plains slumped onto the nearest pool table while Long-tall swung up and down, again and again with the pool cue. It was only again and again and not another again because it only took Jim that long to get on the other side of the bar. Willie Nelson was wailin' something about his heroes always being cowboys when Jim got a handful of Long-tall's ponytail and started kickin' his ass (literally) out the door of Cactus Jack's. The co-eds left the beer on the table and headed for the Volvo as fast as their Tretorns could carry them. Once inside, they locked the doors and were about to peel out on the gravel amidst wails from Long-tall, barks from Boozer, and warnings accentuated with a thick-heeled boot placed strategically in the pants of the offender to "Never, ever come back!" when a thump shook the car. The driver slammed on the brakes and gasped. Soft thumps and moans could be heard from the trunk. What was it? one wanted to know. What was happening on the back of the car? They were too afraid to look, but when they did, Long-tall was being carried off by his two pals — he couldn't walk for himself. And Jim was telling them not to worry, that Long-tall would never be back. When the girls got back to campus, there was a dent the size of a baseball on the trunk lid. The middle of the trunk was scratched so that it was a completely different color from the rest of the car. But the blood that had been blown dry by the trip home was the worst. Big spots clumped together and smaller ones splattered to the left and right. And one long smear where Jim had dragged him by the ponytail off the trunk.

Now I'm not sayin' Long-tall brought his friends to Cactus Jack's Brew and Billiards that night lookin' for a fight — you can decide that for yourself. What I am sayin' is that he found one. And what I'm also sayin' is he never came lookin' again . . . or if he did, nobody said.

Ashley Whitsitt

UNTITLED

Sister, bubble sparkling,
in air iridescent with hope,
Where have you gone?

Same life,
prickly night's mane,
straight, small frame,

Now, change-
ling: heart squeezes
a cold brightness
freezing love,

Crab like you scuttle
into a separate shell,
afraid of the sea-world.

Hands grasp for love,
hook sunny snow,
Soul impaled by basilisk eyes

Old love buds, yet
caught in an early frost,
No more Spring,

Paula Brown

OLD FASHIONED DAY — WHITE ANIMALS TRILOGY

"I woke up this mornin',
my head hurt so bad,
the worst hang-over I ever had . . . "

Those were the words that I woke up with this morning. Amazing how songs can say exactly how you're feeling, at any given moment, in any given situation. You wonder how song-writers these days make any money. How can they think of anything new to say — or even a new way to say it. Some things are just beyond me.

Anyway, those are the only words of that song that apply to the way I'm feelin' today. It certainly wasn't a "Double-Shot of My Baby's Love" that gave me this headache. I'm lyin' in bed — I guess you could call it bed, it's got a mattress and a frame, but it looks and feels to me like, I dunno, nuclear fall-out or something. I forgot to pull the shades last night when I finally got into this mess of a bed, and the sun is blazin' in like Judgement Day. Christ! my head hurts! My eyes are, like, glued shut with the hard sleep that comes from too much alcohol consumption and too many useless tears. God, now I remember . . . but I'm tellin' ya now, it's not because I'm wantin' to, and it's not for lack of tryin' that I couldn't forget it last night, either. Usually, tequila's the best thing to get pain off your mind — at least until the "morning after," anyway. But last night, ole Jose just couldn't pull it off.

I'm tryin' to sit up and shake off this heavy funk, but that sun is just poundin' in like your pop tryin' to drag your lazy ass out of bed in high school. I've gotta close those blinds or ole Mr. Sunshine's gonna fry my eyeballs out, and I'll be sellin' pencils on the corner.

My neck's killin' me, too — God, I'm a mess!!! Too, too many exclamation points in my thoughts this mornin' — can not handle interjections this mornin'. Can't handle the memories either. Bad thing about memories . . . they never will just go away when you want them to.

Got a call late last night — or, rather, early this mornin'. Jim Edgerton, my best friend from high-school, was beat the hell out of and died on the way to the hospital. The sons-of-bitches just left him down in nigger-town bleeding to death, and dying of loss of blood and exposure. The hospital called me 'cause when Jim's mom ran out on him after his dad died of black lung, he moved in with me and my pop. Pop never legally adopted Jim, but we were his next of kin and I guess he had the number or somethin' on him. Maybe somebody workin' the night shift knew him, I dunno. All I know is I get this call in the middle of my one night a week to sleep good, and it's this chick I don't even know tellin' me that my best friend — my almost brother! — is lyin' dead in the hospital morgue, and they don't even know what happened or who did it to him.

What do you do when somethin' like that hits you right outta left field? When the only living soul who loves you is offed in the dead of night by some two-bit hoods from a hick town? Well, mister, I don't know what you do, but I drink myself into a stupor, and wake up feelin' like I not only ate the neighborhood tomcat, but six señoritas in stilettos did a flamenco on my skull.

All I've got to look forward to is the funeral which will be attended by all of Ridgeton. The Ladies' Guild will bring about a thousand disgusting casseroles. And everyone will stand around and say things like, "So sorry, Steve, Jim was a good boy," and, "I know it hurts, son, but time heals all wounds." Like I really wanna hear that shit, and like it's really supposed to make me feel a whole lot better! How can anyone know what to say in a situation like that? How can they know what to say?? All I want is to be alone and to hold on to the dream of the way things were — it was such a peaceful dream

— before all this nightmare stuff. I just want to close my eyes on this whole day.

I've gotta get outta this bed! I have things to do, and arrangements to make. Not my style at all, but right this red-hot second I need about a gallon of Coke. Can't even walk right — must still be drunk — can't imagine why! Jesus Henry Christ! my mouth tastes like dirty feet . . . well, ya know how they smell, that's what I mean. My teeth, they're, like, I dunno, I mean, I wonder if I got a little crazy and chased the Cuervo with a little rubber cement. Could be, ladies and gentlemen. Stranger things have happened.

Paper boy's been here. Well, I guess so, Steve old sock, it is after noon o'clock — drinkin'll do ya that way. Christ on a Cross! Jim, my boy, you made front page of the LOCAL DRUG RING. So, it was those bastards! Should've figured. But what exactly happened?

"About 9:00 p.m. last night, members of a local, previously unidentified, drug ring attacked and killed twenty-year-old James Kevin Edgerton by mistake."

By mistake! By mistake! Those dope-heads killed my fucking blood brother by mistake! This is not happening. This is not, DID not happen.

"Apparently, a buyer, Miguel Sanchez, had shot one Daryl Morgan. The young men were looking for Sanchez, and found young Edgerton instead. One gang member told the police that they (he and some other members of the gang) had been 'hangin' out at their regular spot on the streets,' Sanchez approached them for a purchase. The deal was made, and money had changed hands, when suddenly Sanchez went 'absolutely berserk, man!' Sanchez pulled a gun and told the boys that if they didn't give him the money and the drugs, he would shoot them all. After a moment's hesitation, Sanchez fired wounding Morgan. He then turned and fled."

I'll just bet he "turned and fled!" The dirty little spic! Greasy little shit, I hope they get him! Nothing really ever changes, does it? It's like the days of chivalry like we learned in eleventh grade English. Or like in the Bible . . . an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The greaser shot the doper, so the doper's friends go out looking to get the spic. But instead they kill my buddy. My buddy who never hurt anybody. Who couldn't even pass biology in tenth grade because he couldn't dissect that stupid frog while it was still alive to test its stupid reflexes. Human nature just stays the same, doesn't it. You hurt me or mine, and I'll hurt you just that much worse. I guess that old line has just been reaffirmed by this charmer. Only what happens when the wrong people get dragged in? What happens to the people they leave behind with their faces scrunched up, their minds turned to fresh cream of wheat, their mouths out of which can only come those three immortal words, "What the hell?" Dunno . . . it's a question for JEOPARDY — maybe Alex can figure it out in his suit by Mr. Guy.

"Later that night, young Edgerton was walking in the area of Fifth and Sycamore alone when the other local boys approached him from behind mistaking him for Sanchez. They beat him repeatedly about the skull and chest with bricks and baseball bats and their fists, until he became unconcious."

"Let's beat up the kids
with bricks and baseball bats!"

Jim-boy, Pop used to sing that to us all the time, remember? Well, of course you don't now. But you would if you still could remember. Pop would die if he were alive to know what they did to you.

Those cops better get those guys. I'm not gonna do it, though, buddy. Not because I'm yellow . . . you know that's not true. It's just . . . I dunno . . . that's what happened to you, and somewhere along the line this kind of thing has got to stop, ya know?

"The police had been called by neighbors who had heard the cries for help. Hearing the sirens, the boys fled the scene. Later, they were apprehended, and the whole sordid tale came out. 'Upon leaving the unconcious and now dying Edgerton, Morgan told the police that they realized Edgerton was not the boy they had been looking for. He has been quoted as saying, 'Hey, man, I don't know who that guy was. Just some Joe who was in the wrong place at the wrong time wearin' the wrong jacket. We're really sorry about what happened. God, I can't believe it . . . I'm really sorry!"

Yeah, I just bet you're sorry, doper! And I'm only hopin' you're gonna be sorrier. I hope they put you away for life, and some faggot in the joint throws you over and stabs AIDS up your sorry, sorry ass! Oh, Jesus, why'd this have to happen?!

So now I can't stop crying. And the old lady who lives upstairs is gonna be down here to investigate the howls. But I really just can't stop, man. This could have so easily been avoided. I just . . . I dunno, it's just such a god damn waste! This morning's news read like in the days of Al Capone or something. Not that big time, of course, but it's that same old shit revenge. It's gotta stop, that's all there is to it. Why can't people just see that?

And I've still gotta face that funeral crowd.

"So sorry, Steve, Jim was a good boy."
"Thank you, sir, yes he was."
"I know it hurts, son, but time heals all wounds."
"Yes, ma'am, I'm sure it does."

All I want is to hold to a peaceful dream in solitude
Close my eyes on this old-fashioned day.

Ashley Whitsitt

RAPACIOUS

The morning mist
Has chiseled out
One small place
And I am in it
Eyes squinting to see
The water's edge
Curiously seeking
Movement beyond me
Blinded by the glare
Yet I hear the surf
Rising and falling
Pushing the sand
And bits of life ashore
Then snatching both
Back again in greed

Andrea F. Varela

NINE PM

Feeling of inadequacy
blocked by mountains
that are made from molehill
thoughts.
I must climb.

Anxieties and fears
make heavy rain exude from
my palms.
Unable to get a grip.
I shake to one tune
while my skin shakes to another.

Sunken in tears
drowning in sorrows.
My enemy stands.
Those eyese pierce down in me.
The enemy throws me a rock.
I must float up
I will swim to safety.

Tanya Watley

Nicole Wilson

DEBRIS AND THE KING'S HORSES

It's happened again.
My life has fallen apart into tiny little
Colored pieces of debris that clutter the floor,
And I feel like someone
(Who?)
Is beginning to
Whisk it away in the straws of a giant broom.
My debris is crying out —
  don't throw me away!
  don't . . .
      throw me away.

So many times before I have managed
To put those tiny little colored pieces
    together again;
But this time I fear Humpty Dumpty
Has fallen off his wall—
Permanently.
There are no king's horses or king's men
    for me.
They galloped away long ago.
But they left the broken debris of Humpty
Shattered at the base of his wall.
They didn't throw him away.
And me — I'm just tiny little
Colored pieces of debris.

Sara L. Jenkins

A HUNTER OF ONE'S OWN EXISTENCE

. . . and as I lie in bed all I can see is a huge, endless, blank, white wall in front of me. Behind me is nothing, open space, air, and I am in the middle of everything

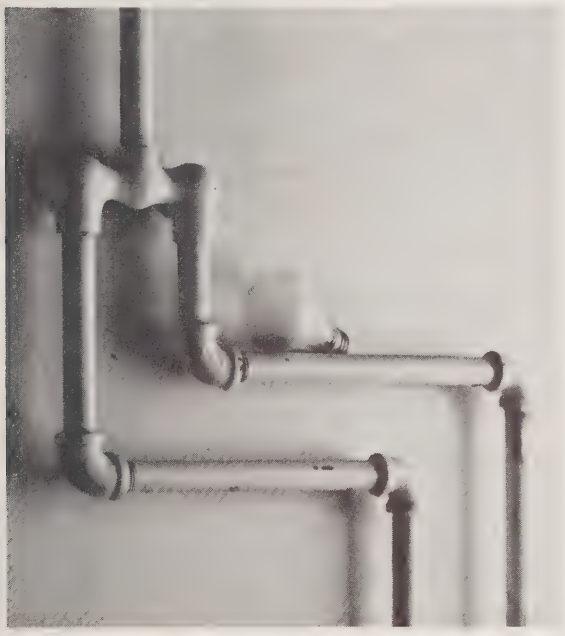
. . . and as I lie in bed and scratch my butt, my anus, and watch the moonlight stream into my room in the early morning, and listen to the rats eat away the trash on my floor, in the wastsebasket, the insulation on the insides of the walls, and hearing this, waiting for the ghost to come, waiting for a sunrise, waiting for the rats to finally to find my hand that is hanging off the bed, on the floor, waiting for the rats to find it, to start nawing at its flesh, then the bone, then the wrist.

. . . and as I lie in bed at three oclock in the morning waiting for something to happen, though for what I don't know, and I wonder if the only truth to life is death, that if I killed myself now would I experience truth, or would I only experience another falsehood, like so many that I have already encountered, that people are innately good, that everything works out in the end — for the best, that money is good, that civilization is the goal of man, that it makes no difference whether the soft glowing light flowing into my room is the light of the full moon or the light of the glowing fluorescent street light outside my window, down the street — where the rats live naturally in the gutters eating the waste of civilization, just as God intended them to do when they where created a billion years ago.

. . . and as I lie here, in bed, I think of walking through the streets of this city in the early morning with the glow of the street lights over my head, blocking out the celestial light. It is cold, the fall has come, even to the city, forcing the rats inside, forcing everything that is warm-blooded to find heat, warmth, to find shelter from the cold breeze that blows through this street, my boots ringing against the cold asphalt, the echos resounding from the equally chilled concrete walls trying to remember where I am going, where I can find heat.

. . . and as I lie here, cold, in bed, in front of the white wall, with nothing visible behind me, scratching my anus, waiting for something to happen, at three o'clock in the morning, with the moonlight (at least hope it is the moonlight) streaming in the windows of my room, waiting for the truth, a truth, and I realize a fact, the fact that I can never tell someone what exactly is on my mind. I am alone.

Paula Brown



Michael Snell

NIGHT RAIN

Night rain
Hitting window panes
Floods cheeks
With black tears
Turning pores
To streaming rivulets
Dripping polka dots
To my shoulders
Soundless reflections
Rip splashing tears
In glazed fabric
Of molten sepia

Andrea F. Varela

THE GYPSY

They followed the strange looking boy from a distance, the three of them, without knowing who had first decided to. He never looked back, although he seemed aware that they were following him. He walked slowly, stopping here and there, looking at the shop windows. The clock in the tower of the old church, sticking high above the rest of the town, chimed two, its grey tiled roof and bricks of indefinable darkish color in contrast with the red tiled roofs of the brightly trimmed houses around it. The air was humid and oppressive, enclosing them, as they walked, unnoticed amidst the Saturday shoppers. The town was busy on this afternoon, in the street were women on their bicycles, who carried bags packed with groceries on both sides of the handlebars and often a little child in a seat on the back, other children, carrying their loads, like replicas riding behind them.

Dora walked a few steps behind the other two girls, a slim figure in her summer dress of white and red seersucker fabric, a little too short for her long legs. She was tall for her age, and had outgrown her summer dress too early. Her short blond hair and freckled face gave her a boyish look; still flat chested she was barely aware of the changes taking place in her female classmate's bodies. Annie and Tina were close friends, they both had older siblings and to Dora they seemed more mature, wiser. Boys noticed them, and walked them home after school. In the classroom they exchanged tightly folded notes with their boyfriends. Dora envied them.

As they followed the boy, Tina and Annie talked about going to the carnival on Monday and the boys who would take them on the rides and buy waffles and lemonade for them. Their conversation did not include Dora and, walking behind them, she felt apart from them, lost in her own world of thought. Her parents did not allow her to go to the carnival; they considered Dora too young and were too busy to take her. Last year her grandmother had given her a box with silver coins for her birthday. The coins were being taken out of circulation, making place for nickel coins. Instead of saving them she had secretly spend them at the carnival.

Dora had seen the boy at other times, always walking slowly; his down cast eyes seemed to notice Dora. It intrigued her. His black hair made him stand out from the blond haired, blue eyed Dutch, his strange clothes and dark eyes lending him an even more mysterious look. A gypsy he was.

Maybe once a year a group of gypsies would come through town. The older people paid no attention but to the children it was very exciting and, dropping their games, they would line the side-walks to watch them pass.

The horse-drawn wagons hobbled over the cobble stones, the metal rimmed wheels making a rattling sound, buckets and other household goods tied to the outside, frantically swaying back and forth. The gypsy family sat on the driving box, the men holding the whip upright in their hand, almost as a warning not to come close. The women sat with scarved heads, in layers of exotic and colorful dresses. The gypsy children like copies of the adults, were mostly barefooted and dirty looking.

They spread an air of mystery, as they went through town waking it up from its sleepy routine. After setting up camp at the edge of the town, in some unused field, the men went from door to door offering their knife-and scissor grinding services, the women selling their wares, the children hiding behind their skirts. To the town children they were curious creatures from a different world with whom they had nothing in common except their age. They stared at them.

Dora was fascinated by the gypsies, who, in her imagination, had become somewhat romantic. The stories the adults told about them made no difference. The townspeople did not trust the gypsies and doors that always went unlocked, were suddenly secured, even during the day.

Following her two friends Dora remembered the warnings her mother had given her, but like a

magnet, the strangeness attracted her, the caution making it even more exciting. They were leaving town now, a few houses were scattered around and the fields lay ahead of them. The boy took a narrow gravel road leading to a farm, about a mile away. There was a sloping bank with tall grass on each side of the road, before it steeply declined and halted at a row of pollard-willows lining the ditch, their erratic shapes reaching up, like condemned souls, begging for mercy.

"I think we should go back," Tina said, "I am scared, I think I hear thunder."

The polderlandscape stretched out to the horizon, the green meadows intersected by ditches, making a checkered pattern, broken here and there by rows of poplar trees, like thin plumes, marking the road to a farmhouse. In the distance the spires of churches could be seen, indicating the next town.

"I am not about to go back," Annie said, "but you can if you want to," she took off her shoes and walked on in the grass. Dora and Tina stood still for a moment, contemplating turning around. After a moment or so they went on cautiously, not quite afraid enough to go back.

The boy stood still now, he looked around for a moment, then sat down in the grass beside the road. When they slowly came closer, his black eyes hardly seemed to take notice. They sat down on the other side in the grass, the road in between them.

Dora could feel the sun's warmth through her clothes, radiating inside of her, she felt light, she felt something she had never experienced before, her fear making way for excitement and even if the other two had left at that moment, she would have stayed, hypnotized by his strange eyes.

After a while he took something out of his pocket, a coin, and played with it, glancing at them occasionally, flipping it from hand to hand, like a juggler. He looked at them now, a strange expression on his face. Then, without saying a word, looking at Dora, he threw the coin to her; it landed on the side of the road. A silver guilder! It just lay there, shiny, foreign between the dull pebbles. Dora looked at it, wanting it, but scared to come any closer to the strange boy. Suddenly she jumped up, and ran over to the guilder; with a "thank you" she picked it up and joined by the other two girls, she ran back down the little road towards town, the guilder like a trophy, tightly held in her hand.

Agaat Milam

G-IMAGE

I see her true self. Midnight
has come and gone.
I come out of sleep watching the room I share
with Gearl.
My eyes slide through the blinds
looking at the lamp post of blue light.
Close enough to imagine
I could jump to the post, but
thank God not dumb enough.

Crawling my eyes back into the room,
I look at Gearl.
Her self comes to light.
Yellow floats the G-image
like moving cartoon lines.
Rise it does, a foot, hovering over her head.
Blue eye shadow it wears.
A little angry,
It seems: jagged teeth gnawing
at me.
Its hair now standing
tall with fierce determined hatred.
Wild it is, as hell is hot,
like the head from where it rose.

Tanya Watley

IRISH COFFEE

Lois Henry

"Why din't you tell me they was Yankees. I'da never gone over there," I said to my smart aleck daughter. She's a college graduate 'n all.

"Well, you liked them, didn't you, Daddy?" She smart talked back to me as usual. We was walkin' back to Sammy Louise's house in her fancy neighborhood, after visitin' her new friends.

"Yeah, I'd a thot they'd be shits, but they was ok," I said. "Wanted to see inside that house anyway. Looks like a damn movie star house from the outside with windahs in the roof. Didn't like the inside no better. Never could find an easy chair or nuthin'. Just that slippery sofa. I kept sliden' down and had to try and straighten up alls the time. It was so low to the floor, might as well of sat on the floor to begin with."

"They talked about truckin', Daddy. I'm sure you liked that?" Sammy Louise said. She made me so ticked off sometimes. It weren't no use tryin' to talk to her so I just said, "They was ok," and let it go at that.

Emma, Sammy Louise's mama, just kept quiet. Guess she din't have no 'pinion. The visitin' was over and that's that, she musta been thinkin'.

* * * *

Then I membered talkin' about tomato sandwiches and I still thought them Yankees musta been lyin' when they said they'd never had a tomato sandwich! Well, now Emma, she told 'em how to rub salad dressin' all over the bread, and then slap them fresh maters in 'tween and you got yo'self the best sammich ever was. And, banana sandwiches too. Them folks from the north don't know nuthin'.

I tried talkin' bout the colored astronaut who was the speaker at Sammy Louise's graduation ceremonies. They had no interest in discussin' the sit-U-ation. I just don't like colored folks sittin' up there on the platform with dignitaries and such. That famous doctor was sittin' there with the college president. He's the one that come up with the vacination for polio. Now, to my mind, that's a person of importance.

Well, I said to myself, maybe they'd play somethin' on the piano. A nice shiny black one was sitting there in the livin' room, so I aske 'um who played it. They said they couldn't play no more, so I guessed it was just there for show-off reasons.

I din't like the kitchen in that house neither. Weren't no place to eat supper 'cept sittin' on them high stools like in a saloon. 'Course, Sammy Louise says they eat supper in the dinin' room most times.

And, that woman, she aske me had I ever been up north? Well, Hell, I told her a thing or two. I drove my rig up to Toledo and back lots of times haulin' cigarettes.

Her husband, now, he was polite 'n all, askin' me 'bout my business. He seemed right genuine too. Not all puffed up like that woman. She sat on that sofa like that snooty lady down to the unemployment office last summer, askin' me all sorts of questions. This Yankee woman asks what was I goona do when I retire? She weren't no spring chicken herself, tho she wore tight black pants and a red sweater trying to show off her boobs. I noticed that.

Anyway, Emma just shut her up good, sayin we was buyin' a camper and travelin' west when we retire. I think the Yankee woman was kinda jealous then. I saw it in here eyes. I kin harly wait 'till next January. I ordered me one of them license plates with ma name on it. Gonna say, "BUCKY BOB" right there on the backa my Bronco.

We didn't stay much longer after that. Seems like the talkin' just petered out.

* * * *

Sammy Louise butted right into my ponderin' and said, "Daddy, how'd you like the Irish Coffee?"

"It's alright," I said. "Might rather a hada couple shots of bourbon or a few beers, though."

SUMMER ESCAPE

Early morning fog enshrouds the mountaintop and wraps itself like a cloak around the cottage. I sit on the long couch by the huge stone fireplace. A fire snaps and its flames whisper their comforting warmth. The cottage has been closed for much of the summer, and the rooms carry a damp and musty odor. It is unusually chilly this Labor Day weekend, and yesterday's heavy rainfall has erased all chances of holding the annual members' tennis tournament. If I am completely honest with myself, I must admit that I'm really thankful for having this time to myself.

The room is quiet except for the fire's soft and constant whir. An occasional loud pop catches my attention and interrupts my thoughts which are trying desperately to recapture the summer before last. It was my mother's last summer here, and she was so thankful to be in the mountains. Years of emphysema had weakened her and made her body fragile. How vividly I remember her, sitting at the green leather card table by the corner window. This was her favorite spot, for she could look across the shimmering lake and hear the laughter and voices of the swimmers enjoying the cool mountain water. She was acutely adept at working crossword puzzles. If a word had her absolutely baffled, she would pick up her needlework until she was further inspired.

Now bookshelves stretch across the wall behind the card table. My eyes scan the conglomeration of books. There are paperbacks by John MacDonald, as well as books on golf and salt-water fishing — my dad's favorites. Then, there is mother's collection of crossword dictionaries and cookbooks. Further inspection reveals Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, and Pride and Prejudice, summer reading for my sisters and myself. The shelves are filled with many old friends. I wish I could remember more of their details. I imagine I need more days like today to re-kindle our friendship.

There is a small white box on the lowest shelf. I wonder what it contains. I open it and find a small copper bell with a stem of yellow wildflowers. I gave it to mother that last summer so that she could ring it if she needed help. It still has a "Handmade" tag on it. Mother never wanted to be a bother to anyone; no wonder it is still in its box. I see the glass ashtray on the shelf. For the past ten years, its main purpose was to hold mother's clip earrings that she would remove when they began to pinch her ears too tightly.

The top shelf holds antique amber and moss green bottles of various shapes and sizes. Their colors are interesting, but their emptiness gives me a hollow feeling inside. These have been here as long as I can remember, but if this were my house, I'm sure something else would fill that top shelf.

I put a few dry logs on the fire and am greeted with an immediate burst of flames. I rest my sock-dressed feet on the wooden-bordered, slate-top table in front of the couch. I am surprised at being able to feel the coolness of the slate through my socks. My eyes follow the flames until they disappear up the chimney. Above the fireplace, the rough-hewn wooden mantle is trophy laden. Silver mint julep cups declaring tennis and swimming awards, line the old cut log. I remember the excitement when these were won; but for some reason, they seem more important to me now.

The room is dressed in yellows, golds, and oranges. It was clothed in its new wardrobe only a few years ago. Old ceiling beams, separated by two cross beams, divide the ceiling into thirds. This interruption seems to help fill the long expanse of the room. I chuckle as I stare at the arrangement of knots on the dark pine walls, for it appears that strange demon-like faces are peering back at me.

Directly across from the fireplace is the TV. Many foggy days have been spent before it. If I lean back a little and crane my neck to the right, I can see through the dining room window to the edge of

the woods behind the house. On clear days, the openings between the trees offer a view of the eleventh green. Today, I only catch glimpses of tree trunks. We put a salt block on a stump in the back yard to entice deer. The day before yesterday, we watched as five small deer took turns at the salt lick. I wonder if they have been there again this morning.

Suddenly, the door bangs! I am snatched out of my thoughts and memories. My son yells, "It looks like the fog may be lifting. Can we go for a walk?" "Yes", I reply, "But let me enjoy this room awhile longer".

Marjorie Crane

Michael Snell

FREE I AM

This place is moldy
I don't fit the mold
I will not allow myself to be caught in that mold
I was born to be free
not caged.
Just like the wind,
never caught in a storm,
but is the storm.
Animals, when caged, are unable to be natural in such captivity.
So why, why should I be caged, molded.
Free I want to be
as the clouds are in the sky, able to come and go.
Free I will be
as far as the stars are away.
Free I am.
I won't be in that mold, that cage:
fear to experience and explore at the top
tradition one side
pride on another
arrogance and conceit have their sides
stagnation has his side
close mindedness is the bottom
and that stench of black ignorance is the lock.
To be caged
is not
my style.

Tanya Watley

Queens College
SIGNET Staff

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